

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 24, 1895, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Convent of the Assumption, 10 rue Nitot, Paris, France. May 24, 1895. My dear Alec:

It was very nice indeed to receive your telegram yesterday morning. I was just beginning to feel troubled and had the day before sent Charles to the General Post Office to make sure that there were no cables for Lebani. I told him to register then, but I shall have to write the Director himself. I was beginning to fear that something was wrong and that therefore you did not cable. I am glad to know just where you were. Sunday I spent some time calculating just where you might be at that hour. I thought you might be arriving at Halifax then. I am glad that you received my welcoming note at Beinn Bhreagh and liked it. I dreaded that Mr. McCurdy might have forwarded it back to Washington. Evidently he has a head on his shoulders and didn't.

Well we have been here since five o'clock yesterday afternoon, just twenty-four hours and so far everything is couleur de rose. The Mother welcomed us so warmly that we felt as if we were in a friend's house. No friend could be more thoughtful for our wants in every way since arriving last night, to be sure that we had enough blankets and the hot water when we wanted it, and this morning to know if we had slept well and all was to our liking. Then this afternoon when Daisy had a headache and would not come down to lunch she sent up a cup of tea and eggs and a hot water bottle to the child. Our rooms are single, but very pretty and cosy and clean, with polished wax floors and thick rugs 2 in the center, bright and flowered chintz curtains before doors and windows and around the beds. Then there are little dressing rooms off each room so that the bedroom may well serve as a parlor. I think if I were not known here and had friends here I would rest satisfied with our two pretty bedrooms. As it is I think you would prefer my having a parlor since I can have one

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at a little additional expense, 1000 frs. per month for the three of us. This is of course not quite what I set out to do, but I think I have done nearly as well for the French as if I put the children in different families and I am sure I have done much better than I could in any other way as far as health and comfort are concerned. Judging by the two meals we have had the table is excellent and the sanitary arrangements are unexceptional. We went to mass at the chapel this morning, it being the feast of the Ascension and a church and legal holiday. It is a very pretty little chapel, all white with little gold and stained glass windows, and the nuns and their charges made a most pretty sight, the children all in white, shoes, stockings and gloves with long white muslin veils, the nuns in rich purple dress with white linen head-dress and broad collar, and white cloth veil and a long white cloth robe of state with a purple cross on one shoulder. The nuns usually wear only the short purple dress knotted at the waist with a heavy purple cord, but for the feast they put on this long mantle which trailed behind them. Elsie is my authority for the shoulder cross, I did not see it. The children said the music was very beautiful, but they got tired before mass was over, so they have not as yet taken any harm. Elsie and I made some calls this afternoon and then the children went for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne with Miss Duncan. It is a very lovely day, the first nice one we have had since we arrived and it was delightful just to sit in the cab and enjoy the mild air, pleasant sunshine and see the fine carriages with their brilliant occupants pass and repass. There is so much color, worn so boldly that I am amazed. They say that bicycling is all the rage now and that if I take the right time I shall see all the swell ladies on the wheel in bloomers. I believe no one attempts to ride a bicycle in any other garb. Daisy says she saw a lady walking in bloomers leading her machine. It is an ordinary sight to see gentlemen in the business streets walking in knickerbockers, evidently to or from their bicycle but without it. Perhaps the wheel will accomplish what dress reformers, male and female have hitherto failed to perform, induce both gentlemen and ladies to wear knickerbockers. All success as far as gentlemen are concerned, but preserve us from it for ladies. The children are to wear the uniform of the school, a simple dress of dark blue. The nuns did not insist upon their doing so, but the children wanted to and I thought that by letting them wear this dress they would save their others.

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I find that Elsie is rather noticeable in the streets. Yesterday I left her alone for a moment to go back and leave a message I had forgotten at the hotel. It was but for a few moments and I thought she would be all right at midday in a crowded street and quietly looking at some photographs in the shop windows. But some one came up and spoke to her and she thinking he might be some friend of yours as he was not young, answered and they seem to have carried on quite a conversation before Elsie had presence of mind to come back to me. I will not let her out 4 alone again and she has no desire whatever for solitary wanderings at any time and still less now. I have always been out with the children myself, or sent Charles with them and they will not go alone again, but I thought no harm that time for the few moments necessary to walk a block and say a few words. She is such an innocent baby, poor little girl, and while aware that she oughtn't to be, is frankly pleased at what she takes to be a tribute to her good looks. The man asked her if she were making a collection of old lace and then supposed she was too young, finally asked her if she liked dogs and if she were going to the dog show— she said she was waiting for her mother and then came back to me. I do not think it can be usual to meet such a transparent nature as Elsie's. She is so thoroughly frank and unreserved that you see the best and worst of her at once, all her hardness, selfishness and want of sympathy, her absorption in herself, and her pleasure in her own good looks, and at the same time her perfect sincerity and honesty, her great desire to do right, to be a good woman and to conquer her faults. At one moment hard and obstinate, at the next so gentle and yielding. She never sulks and is wonderfully obedient. Daisy is far more reserved and more ready to argue a point of obedience, but very thoughtful and with a mind so bright and clear and resourceful that it is a delight to watch her meeting any little difficulty. Elsie does all the talking in French. She is less shy about stumbling along than Daisy whose language I believe is more correct. Tomorrow their lessons begin. The young American lady says that Madame La Superieure is so remarkable, directing every detail of the convent herself from the 5 studies to the meals. There are I understand 250 pupils, sixty superior nuns and several inferior nuns. I

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have not seen her lately as we never go to the convent but have our own entrance. The garden is quite 2 acres and our house is it's width from the convent. Goodnight.

Ever yours.